

## DISASTER PLAN

### Continuations of Operations (COOP)

The 2021 COOP for the Division of Family Services is attached. This plan is confidential and protected under FOIA. Therefore it will be submitted to the Children's Bureau, but is not posted on the public-facing website. The COOP plan was not activated for a natural disaster during 2020.

Virginia's child welfare services are carried out in a state-supervised and locally-administered system. Local departments, as part of local government, must develop individual emergency procedures as they are aware of emergency resources and supports within their area as well as the unique disasters to which each region of the state is particularly exposed. If, during the emergency/disaster situation, child abuse or neglect is reported, it will be handled by the locality where the alleged abuse/neglect occurred. If the state office is forced to close or relocate due to a disaster, service provision will continue to be offered through local departments of social services. Local departments that are in counties and cities that border other states have working relationships with those states and services could be provided there if there are adequate resources available to help.

VDSS continually maintains the Active Foster Care Report in an Excel file on an external hardware (jump drive). The jump drive is in the possession of the Foster Care Program Manager so that during an emergency/disaster situation, information regarding the children in foster care will be available outside of the automated child welfare data base. Additionally, in a disaster situation, VDSS staff will be available through the state hotline toll- free number for the community to contact for child welfare related service needs, referral information for services, and to notify the state office of displaced clients in the event the situation impacts the LDSS and the local office cannot be reached. The toll-free number will be given to the media and disseminated to local departments of social services. The regional offices serve as operation centers for service referrals and information throughout the state, including assistance with psychotropic medication. Virginia also operates "211" Information and Referral hotline that is available for locating services and assistance state-wide. Alternative contact information for divisional staff will be highlighted on the Department's website to make it easier for clients and other states to contact the necessary people. The LDSS shall ensure foster families and providers develop plans that help protect their families and also provide communication information for use in emergency situations (Emergency Plans Form). In the event the foster family or other provider needs to evacuate, information regarding the whereabouts of children in foster care and contact information shall be communicated to the LDSS. If the LDSS cannot be reached, the information shall be communicated to VDSS via the hotline and VDSS will enter the information into OASIS.

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

Due to the COVID – 19 pandemic, the Governor declared a state of emergency on March 12, 2020 and issued a Stay at Home order on March 30, 2020. Virginia is currently under a modified stay at home order with a universal mask mandate. Teleworking is highly encouraged and VDSS and many local departments are utilizing telework options.

VDSS and local departments moved quickly to ensure continuation of services. DFS has provided resources to the local departments including ongoing FAQ, tools and tip sheets, broadcast

communications, self-care resources, and technological resources. The job aids were distributed to local departments, uploaded on COMPASS|Mobile, and posted on the FUSION intranet.

- “Home Visiting Screening Flow Chart”, developed to provide screening questions for FSS to ask about COVID-19 exposure and symptoms prior to and upon arrival of a home visit.
- “Tips for Home Visiting” guide, developed to provide health and safety tips for FSS when preparing for and arriving at home visits.
- “Virtual Worker Visits” guide, developed to provide guidance on how to virtually assess child and family well-being, the home environment, safety and protective factors, and develop a safety plan.
- “Virtual Family Time and Visitation for Visit Coordinators/Supervisors” guide, developed to provide tips on how to facilitate virtual visitation with parents, siblings, and extended family members.
- “Preparing for a Virtual Worker Visit—Tips for Families” guide, developed to assist FSS in preparing families for virtual worker visits.

Staff compiled a resource list for parents and caregivers to collectively ensure well-being and safety for all children and families. While acknowledging this unprecedented time and acknowledging the impact of stress, anxiety, and isolation, the list provided vetted resources in the following areas: economic relief, financial and housing assistance, physical distancing practices, educational and learning from home support, and self-care. DFS also created a campaign to address the concerns of family violence during the period of social isolation. Public service announcements included a series social media posts and the creation of flyers that were provided to community partners and LDSS to share across Virginia to assist families with needed resources. The social media post and flyers provided the hotline numbers for Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services and Family Violence and Sexual Assault.

Fairfax County Virginia shared with VDSS the “COVID Child Outreach Kit” which provided information about identifying and reporting children who may be experiencing or may be at risk of child abuse and/or neglect. VDSS adapted that kit for use by all local departments and has posted it on the Fusion intranet page. The “LDSS Abuse/Neglect Prevention Community Toolkit for COVID 19” can be customized based on a locality’s resources and partners and is made to be shared with school divisions and other community partners. It includes tips, resources, flyers, prevention oriented social media materials, and instructions on how to use local data to drive outreach and decision making.

### **Essential Personnel and PPE**

The Governor declared family services workers as essential personnel on March 25, 2020, which helped to some extent, with obtaining personal protective equipment (PPE). DFS provided LDSS a tip sheet for personal protection during home visits with families. The document was uploaded to the COMPASS Mobile app for easy access by frontline staff. VDSS also published a Broadcast with suggestions for LDSS on how to acquire PPE. Family services workers who responded to a survey sent in April 2020 indicated there was access to PPE in most offices. In some cases, the PPE was provided by the local department but in other cases the individual has to provide their own PPE. VDSS continues to provide ongoing support to LDSS related to obtaining PPE, tracking the purchase of PPE, and guidance on obtaining reimbursement for PPE. On May 1, 2020, VDSS issued a Broadcast for LDSS’ in the use of title IV-B funds and title IV-E administrative funds for PPE expenditures and the cost of cell phones. Several of the smaller local departments had to close due to staff that tested positive for the virus. When the department closed, case work was covered by other local departments nearby.

### **Virtual Visitation**

After receiving guidance from the Administration for Children and Families, Virginia contracted with Doxy.me. DFS has invested \$66,000 to provide this solution free to local departments and all family services specialists who have been issued an Apple iPad for purposes of accessing the COMPASS|Mobile application received an account. Doxy.me is the only VDSS approved software for virtual face-to-face visits as it is HIPAA and HITECH compliant to enable the agency to comply with state and federal privacy and security laws and standards. Instructions were provided to family services specialists on how to set up an account and how to document visitation conducted using Doxy.me in the case management system. Approximately 66% of family services specialist who responded to a survey indicated less than 20% of their contacts with clients were completed in person.

### **Regulatory Waivers**

The Governor allowed state agencies to request waivers for requirements found in regulations. The Commissioner permitted the temporary waiving of some non-safety standards in the following categories: permanency services, foster and adoptive home approval standards, and additional daily supervision rate structure. A Broadcast to the field was posted on April 16, 2020 outlining the regulatory waivers listed below. In addition, details of the Broadcast were outlined in the Family Services' FAQs. At the end of the pandemic situation, the waivers will expire and the requirements will have to be met.

In permanency services, the timeframes for medical and dental exams at entry and for ongoing well-child visits were waived. This decision was due to the limited availability of health and medical providers for non-emergency healthcare services. The timeframe for immediate school enrollment has been waived due to the statewide schools closures. The requirement for face-to-face contact had been amended to allow videoconferencing to meet month worker visits. This modification was consistent with the guidance provided by the Children's Bureau. The requirement of the child-placing agency to register a child with the Adoption Resource Exchange of Virginia (AREVA) was suspended during the state of emergency. And lastly, the initial and in-service training requirements for workers were suspended during the state of emergency.

In foster and adoptive home approval standards, the requirement for regular foster home (non-relative placements) applicants to have tuberculosis assessment, screening, or tests in compliance with Virginia Department of Health requirements was waived. A foster home may be approved prior to completion of the Mutual Family Assessment (MFA), with the understanding that the completed MFA would be required within 90 days of the state of emergency being lifted. The re-approval process for current foster parents, including fingerprint based background checks, in-home interviews with providers, TB assessments, and reviewing confidentiality and corporal punishment requirements, was also suspended during the state of emergency.

Local departments were notified on November 24, 2020 by broadcast that the majority of the regulatory waivers expired December 31, 2020. Non-safety regulatory standards were reinstated effective January 1, 2021. The waivers that have remained in place are the monthly face to face visits with children in foster care and monthly visits for foster parents receiving VEMAT payments in cases where it is obviously unsafe to complete the visit in person. The requirement for face-to-face contact had been amended to allow videoconferencing to meet this requirement. While it is imperative that caseworkers continue to ensure the well-being of children in care, that imperative must be balanced against the health of workers, children in care, and all of the people with whom they come into contact. The monthly caseworker visit requirement remains in place, but the regulation has been modified to permit such visits to be conducted by videoconferencing when it is unsafe to conduct the visit in person. Virtual contacts are only permitted if the family refuses access due to a COVID-19 concern or anyone in the

home has tested positive for COVID-19, has been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days, or has had symptoms in the last 14 days. The home visiting screening conducted prior to initiating the visit should be used to determine if an in-person visit is unsafe due to COVID-19 health/safety related concerns. Agencies have until March 31, 2021 to obtain verification of tuberculosis and physical exams for foster parents and continued approvals (re-approval) for foster and adoptive homes.

### **VEMAT**

- In the additional daily supervision rate structure, the requirement to complete the VEMAT within 14 days of the foster parent's request was extended to 30 days. This only applied to the request to re-administer a VEMAT, not to the request to receive a VEMAT COVID-19 addendum. This reverted back to 14 days January 1, 2021.
- All quarterly and annual administrative reassessment requirements were waived during the state of emergency. The requirement to complete VEMAT reassessments is reinstated as of January 1, 2021. All quarterly and annual reviews which were previously waived must be completed by January 30, 2021.
- The requirement to issue a final score on the VEMAT was extended from five business days to 10 business days. The extension of this requirement allowed for flexibility in accessing the VEMAT online tool as well as ensuring that the VEMAT rater is available to complete it. This reverted back to five business days on January 1, 2021.
- The requirement for the agency to have face-to-face contact every month with the foster parents when they are receiving a VEMAT payment was waived. Contact by telephone and video conferencing was utilized when appropriate. The waiver remains in place when it is obviously unsafe to perform a face to face visit. Otherwise, the monthly in-person visit requirement resumed January 1, 2021.
- The time frame for administering the VEMAT after an emergency placement was extended from 60 days to 120 days. An agency may continue to complete the VEMAT within 60 days but was not required to do so through December 31, 2020. On January 1, 2021, agencies had until January 30, 2021 to complete any VEMAT that had become overdue and must administer the VEMAT within 60 days for any new emergency placements.
- The deadline for the foster parent to request a review of the results of the rate assessment tool was extended from five business days to 30 business days. Effective January 1, 2021, the timeframe returns to five business days.

### **Survey of Local Stakeholders**

Service providers statewide felt the impact of COVID-19. In response to anecdotal stories, the Division of Family Services reached out to all sub-grantee stakeholder agencies to learn more about their experiences. The survey was open for a one week period ending 4/9/20. Responses were received from 96 sub-recipients of child welfare and domestic violence grant funding. The survey was sortable by grant funding sources and revealed differences in impact by the type of organization. The responses showed that domestic violence programs reported an increase in demand for services while the child welfare programs reported a slight decrease in demand. Of greatest significance was the loss of resources, including volunteers, in-kind and cash donations, and unrealized fundraising events. A follow-up survey will be distributed in June.

### **Domestic Violence Funding Increase**

In response to COVID-19, local domestic violence programs restructured their community based services by adapting to electronic tele-health platforms. Confidentiality for victims of domestic violence is a state and federal requirement. Most of the agencies were not pre-prepared for the transition to electronic advocacy and services, but quickly sought out licenses for HIPPA and VAWA compliant platforms. Programs also addressed the needs of their residential shelter programs. To address social distancing goals, many shelters limited the number of families sheltered onsite, utilizing hotels and motels for overflow relief.

### **Data**

During this time DFS has been tracking data related to the pandemic. Topics include: total referrals, referral source, referral acceptance, abuse/neglect screen ins (physical abuse and physical neglect allegations only), referral track, foster care entries and exits, response priority and response timeliness, COMPASS mobile transactions and hotline calls (counts, wait times). This information has been shared with our federal partners and the public. The data is tracked on the Commissioner's weekly dashboard.

### **Training**

During this time of the COVID-19 health crisis and the suspension of our classroom training, our Family Services Training Team has broadened our online learning opportunities to help our learners succeed in their professional and personal goals. In March of 2020, VDSS began converting our foundational new worker guidance classroom courses to a virtual platform using a series of live webinars to bring individual and group work to life in a virtual world and transfer learning from online to on the job through assigned activities and a proficiency test upon completion. The priority of the conversion of classroom courses is based on the number of enrollments already in the VLC and the number of new hires in the local agencies. Additionally, VDSS has prioritized the skills courses needed for new workers to provide their fundamental and essential job functions. The training schedules were listed on the FUSION Division of Family Services Training website on July 6, 2020 and available for enrollment in the COVLC. Additional sessions and courses will be added as needed to accommodate all new workers needing training.

Phase I: New Worker Course Conversion – April to June, repeated in late July and August

- CWS2000.1W: CPS New Worker Guidance Webinar Series
- CWS3000.1W: Foster Care New Worker Guidance Webinar Series
- CWS3010.1W: Adoption New Worker Guidance Webinar Series
- ADS1000.1W: Adult Services New Worker Guidance Webinar Series
- CWS2020.1W: On call for Non-CPS Workers

Phase II: Program Specific Skill Development – June and July

- CWS3041W: Working with Children in Placement
- CWS2011W: Intake, Assessment and Investigation in CPS
- CWS4020W: Engaging Families and Building Trust-Based Relationships
- CWS5307W: Assessing Safety, Risk, and Protective Capacities in Child Welfare
- CWS1061W: Family Centered Assessment
- CWS1071W: Family Centered Case Planning
- CWS1305W: The Helping Interview: Engaging Adults for Assessment and Problem Solving

Phase III: Advanced Program Specific Skills Development – Started in August

- CWS2010W: CPS On-going/In-Home Services

- CWS2021W: Sexual Abuse
- CWS2031.1W: Sexual Abuse Investigations
- CWS2141W: Out of Family Investigations
- CWS1031W: Separation and Loss Issues in Human Services Practice
- CWS3081W: Promoting Family Reunification

Additional course offered as of January 2021

- CWS1021W: The Effects of Abuse and Neglect on Child and Adolescent Development
- CWS1041W: Legal Principles in Child Welfare
- CWS3103W: Mutual Family Assessment
- CWS5011W: Case Documentation
- CWS2000VLL: Capacity Building Learning Lab Protective
- CWS3000VLL: Capacity Building Learning Lab Permanency
- CWS3010VLL: Capacity Building Learning Lab Adoption
- CWS3040VLL: Capacity Building Learning Lab Prevention

### **Time**

The division has worked many hours on activities related to the COVID 19 pandemic. From March 10 – September 9th, DFS staff spent over 8,941 hours working directly on activities related to COVID 19. More than 988 hours of overtime for COVID related work were completed since March 10, 2020. DFS staff, in addition to providing guidance and technical assistance to LDSS, supported other divisions at VDSS. Several staff supported Benefit Program by manning a benefits hotline set up to answer questions related to COVID 19 in addition to completing their DFS duties.

### **Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act**

VDSS submitted an application for reimbursement of \$141,693 for funds expended during Hurricane Florence in response to ACYF-CB-PI-20-01. VDSS was granted \$182,509 and plans to use the funding to upgrade technology.